

UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS LOWELL
CENTER FOR LOWELL HISTORY
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

SHIFTING GEARS PROJECT
BLACKSTONE RIVER VALLEY

INFORMANT: PAULINE WASHINGTON

INTERVIEWER: DOUGLAS REYNOLDS

DATE: MAY 10, 1989

D = DOUGLAS

P = PAULINE

SG-BV-T139

D: We usually start these things, by you giving some background information, on where you were born, how big your family was, what your dad and mom did, things like that.

P: OK, Ok um, you want my name?

D: Oh, Pauline Washington.

D: [laughs] My name is Pauline Harmon Washington. I am a member of the family of sixteen. My family migrated to Woonsocket, Rhode Island, about 1959, 1960 from South Carolina.

D: Rural area?

P: Rural, very rural area. My family were sharecroppers, until some point my father started driving a milk truck.

D: Do you know where that was?

P: No. No date, I could probably get them for you, if they're important to you. Um, about that time, I guess, my grandmother decided to move to Rhode Island, because, I guess, there was work here. And my father decided that we would follow. So, from that time, we gathered all, I guess twelve of us, at the time, into one car, including one sewing machine and drove to Woonsocket, Rhode Island.

D: When was this? 1959?

P: 1959, 1960.

D: How old were you?

P: I was twelve I remember when we came here, I was very disappointed. I was only about twelve years old, but I expected to see tall shiny buildings, instead, I saw, a [unclear], which was depressing.

D: Why?

P: Because it was, at that time, more or less the ghetto area. And I was just a little disappointed as a kid.

D: That's where you moved to?

P: Yeah, we moved here, and stayed with friends and relatives, until we secured a house, an apartment on Borden Boulevard, my mother is still living there today, as a matter of fact. Um, when we moved here, my father, went to work. Where did he go to work? He went to work, in one of the foundries, I think. My mother went to work for a Tupperware company.

D: OK, where was the foundry? Do you know?

P: Oh, God I think it was Whitensville foundry, I'm not positive, I'll have to re-check that.

D: White Machine Works?

P: White Machine Works had a foundry, and I think my mom went to work for White Machines before we came, my older sister had moved also, so she made it little easier for us, in the fact, that we had other relatives here. And other friends from South Carolina had moved here before we had, so they made it a little easier for us.

D: Yeah, why did they come?

P: Because of the factories.

D: For employment.

P: Right see in the south, they were all farmers and no one owned their own farm. So you more or less worked from sun up to sun down. And received maybe \$10.00 for your whole family working. You know , you could have a family of maybe six or seven people working.

D: I wanted to ask you another question, too. You know , most of the black migration in industrial centers in the north occurred during the 1920's and before WW1. Why is it so late in coming to Rhode Island. Why does black migration, north, close to WW2, affec

P: Why was it so late coming to Rhode Island?

D: Or at least to Woonsocket?

P: Yeah. You want me to answer that question? [laughs]

D: Yeah, I want you to answer that.

P: I don't know [laughs]. You should have asked someone, who was a lot older than I am, that question.

D: well they don't know

P: They don't know? The people you interviewed before me don't know that?

D: Well, they don't want to talk about it very much.

P: Why wouldn't they?

D: I don't know. They talk about discrimination when they got to Woonsocket

P: You have to realize, that when I moved here, I was only twelve. And I wasn't really aware of um, any type of segregation or anything like that.

D: When did you become aware of it?

P: In the, in the schools, when we enrolled here, in the school system. We were all automatically, put back one grade, because we were from the south, and therefore they assumed that we you know, our education wasn't "up to par", which wasn't really so. It probably was, but the fact, that lots of us were so intimidated, by you know, by, because we were used to going to school at the time with all blacks. So, it would be natural for you, when you moved to the north, and you're thrown into a group of thirty white and one black, you automatically intimidated. And definitely, you're not going to learn as fast, or you're not going to be, as willing to learn. So that has a lot to do with it.

D: Yeah, did you adjust eventually?

P: Uh, yeah, eventually.

D: How?

P: But, through, more minorities moving here, and more minorities going to school with us, that made it easier.

D: Yeah.

P: But the students, and the teachers didn't make it easier, you had to find a way for yourself.

D: What were your feelings when you walked into that classroom, and saw all whites?

P: Um, I felt at the time, I felt a little inferior. And definitely a little intimidated, as anyone would, when you have thirty kids laughing and you don't know why, you know no one wants to sit near you, no one wants to talk to you, no one wants to be your friend.

D: What did you do to cope?

P: Um, I guess, what we all did, was more or less, talk about it with one another, um, we probably became even closer as a group of people.

D: The blacks?

P: Right, you know to combat it. To make yourself feel, you know better. You know you have this attitude, where you don't need them, because you have your own group of people.

D: Yeah, when you became of age then at a very exciting moment, in terms of race relations in America.

P: Yeah. Yeah

D: What impact did that have on your life?

P: It made me feel like I was a worthwhile human being, because, believe it , no matter how much you tell yourself that this group of people are not better, than you are, when you constantly hear it from people, constantly try to shove it down your throat, it leaves an impact on you. So, the civil rights movement, I think, made the black race, feel a little worthwhile. I mean, we shouldn't, we should have already felt that way, but we didn't, and it took something like that to make us stand up and say, "Well, yeah, I am proud to be what I am."

D: Did you get involved in activities?

P: Not to a large degree. No, no, but I was aware of it.

D: How were feelings, say, Martin Luther King vs. Ideology of somebody like Malcom X?

P: I think basically, it ran parallel. I really think so. I think they both had the right ideas , it's was just that Malcom was a little more vocal about it. It would be great if Martin was alive today, you know, I just wonder what the country would be like today, I just think that Malcom was a little more militant.

D: Just a little.

P: Yeah, I don't think Martin would have ever changed his strategy.

D: What kinds of oppression did you specifically run into when you move here? You talk about the feeling that you were alone and isolated from people

P: But we were, we were terribly discriminated against on every level, housing, jobs, you name it.

D: Any specific instances in your life?

P: Of discrimination?

D: Yeah.

P: Um, basically, I think I've let, I've been told often too, that I don't "think black". There's no such thing as thinking black. You know, you are. I haven't really witnessed any blatant discriminations against myself personally.

D: Even in the classroom, kids laughing at you?

P: Well, that was the worst, and that left the biggest scar of all. But, to be honest, I can't really think of any blatant discriminations that I've witnessed against myself personally. I'm sure there must of been some, but maybe they were minor. To me, the worst was the school system. Which doesn't exist today, because the kids, because there are so many minorities in schools, and they don't have to deal with it. And kids today, are not quite as ignorant as they were. Although it is still there, it's still there. It's not so much now, blacks as it is Laotians and Puerto Ricans. They have another group, you know, to discriminate, to hate.

D: Now, you said your mother worked at Tupperware, and your father in The Whitensville foundry. Did they ever mention any problems with race and work?

P: Well, you have to realize, that they were raised in the south, so, they grew up with it. So, I hate to say it, but, more or less accepted it, and it wasn't anything new to them, so it wouldn't bother them so much, if someone said something out of way, of rude to the. It was pretty much expected. So, it wouldn't have meant that much to them say as you know, as today, my daughter came home and told me something, then that would be more or less shocking. But if this had happened to them, years ago, then they might not even have mentioned it, because it would have been like the norm.

D: Yeah, that's interesting. Did you ever split with your parents on militancy in the movement?

P: No, because, my parents probably didn't really have an opinion, a strong opinion. And, my parents were the type that wouldn't of had a strong opinion, on anything, the war in Vietnam, say, something like that. Today, they probably would, but back then, they wouldn't have.

D: What kind of work did your mother do at Tupperware?

P: I think she did some sort of molding work. Where as in the south, she worked in the fields, then she probably, maybe babysit for the people's farm that the people lived on, or she worked in their chicken farm, or something like that, she washed the clothes, you know that type of stuff,

domestic work.

D: Yeah, did your parents instill in you any sort of work ethic? What did they teach you about work?

D: They really didn't teach me, it's what we observed. And that is, in order to succeed or even to survive, you have to work hard, to get what you want out of life. You know, like, here, in the North, I find, even here at City Hall, people are very big on Secretaries Day, which I think is stupid. You know, I get paid, to do my job. I don't need a secretaries day from my boss, to reward me, because, I work, and that's my reward. That's the way I look at it, and I feel very strongly about that. If you work hard, then you will more or less, succeed. You know, its what you get out of it, what you put into it. And that's hard work. My parents work, you know, from sun up to sun down, with little of nothing.

D: Still?

P: No, my mother and my father are both retired right now. But, then, you know, that was a big impact on me, as a kid growing up.
And that's the way I feel today.

D: Was education a made a big part of your advancement in life?

P: Yeah, in the south, because, that's the only way you would succeed. You know, that's the only way you could break out of the poverty level to go to college, and in the south, it's emphasized, more heavily than it is in the north. In the north, our children don't seem to have this drive for an education. That's because there are so many jobs for them here. Whereas in the South, there really weren't that many, unless you had a college education. So that's why you'll find in the South, you have more people going to college, with degrees as opposed to our relatives here. My family in the north, in the south, basically all of them, have some sort of degree, whereas in the north, our kids drop out of school, you know after high school. That's the way it has been, but, I think you'll find with the generations coming, that, they will go on to college and they will get their degrees. But right now, you have so many kids going to high school and then just dropping out.

D: That's interesting.

P: Yeah, my son went to college for a month, and he quit. He joined the navy. I have a nephew, my sister is very well off and she could send anywhere he wanted to go. In fact, she told my my son, that they could go wherever, and she would pay for both. Gregory, my son, went to school for a month and quit. Her son, never even went.

D: Why do you think they quit, or didn't go?

P: That's interesting, I don't know, I don't, maybe they are not properly motivated. I don't know what it is. I certainly tried to, you know, project an image of a hard working parent, who wished she had went to college. You know, because now, I wouldn't have to work so hard. I work a full

time job and a part time job, because I'm divorced. And I have to do that in order to give my daughter and myself some type of decent life. And I try and tell them, you know, if I had went to college and had an education, I wouldn't have to do all this, it would be a lot easier.

D: Yeah.

P: I don't know, I suppose, we really failed in some way. It seems to be some sort of trend, here in the city of Woonsocket, were we cannot get our children to go to college. They're very few. And it's not because, we can't afford it, because even if we couldn't, my income is such that, my son he had a free scholarship, so that's not it, you know, I don't know what it is. Also, there are not many role models for the kids.

D: Is that true for blacks and whites in Woonsocket?

P: Well, it's definitely true for blacks, maybe so, for whites, too, because quite frankly, I don't think um, the white generation, population, is doing that great, where their kids are concerned either. Maybe, because it is a mill town, and everyone is like on the same level, almost. It's not like an upper class. There's no one, more or less for the kids to compete with.

D: So this is a class issue, rather than a race issue, isn't it?

P: Yeah, really. I really don't see a race issue per se here, in this city. But, something needs to happen to motivate the kids in the school. I don't think they are properly motivated for higher education. Not only, the minorities, definitely, but the whites, too.

D: What about your motivation? You got out of high school, what were you told to do?

P: I wasn't told to do anything. I probably, well really I never, wanted to go to college. In my family, of sixteen, in fact I was the first one, I'm in the middle, about the seventh child, I was the first one to graduate from high school, as a matter of fact.

D: Wow.

P: I never, I probably would have went to college, but I didn't think my parents could afford it. My mom asked me if I wanted to go, but I didn't think she could afford it. And I really, didn't want to burden her with, you know, the possibility, of paying out all this money. Had she been able to afford it, I say my mother, because my mother was the backbone of my family. Had she been able to afford it, I probably would have went. But, I really didn't know what I wanted to do. I wanted to get married, and have a family. And I just wanted, really, to be a secretary. Which is what I am today. I had no motivation, I had no role models. All I knew was, my mother had set an example for me, you know, to work hard, and take care of your family, and

D: Why a secretary? Why not go into Tupperware?

P: Tupperware, oh no, that was too hard.

D: What do mean "hard"?

P: Well, I wasn't about to go in a factory where they had all those loud machines, those, it was loud, it was dirty, it was scary. And I thought I could do better than that.

D: Is secretarial work better than that?

P: I enjoy it more so than that. I like it because, I meet interesting people, you know, often. I enjoy it. The pay certainly could be better, but basically, I'm satisfied with my decision. I could have always gone back to school, but I really didn't want to. I guess I was lazy. I didn't want to.

D: That's interesting.

P: But, also, I didn't know what I wanted to do, even if I had went to school.

D: Let's talk about you work history. What was your first job?

P: My first job, was working, here at city hall after school, doing clerical work.

D: No kidding?

P: Yeah, doing clerical work, working with the same lady, I work now with.

D: In the planning department?

P: Yes, and I then I think I got married and I probably came back, and worked here part time, left and came back.

D: So, really, city hall is the only place you've ever known.

P: Yes

D: That's terrific, how long have you been here?

P: Full time, sixteen years.

D: You seem to like your work?

P: I do, I like clerical work, a big part of it, is you meet a lot of different people, and I enjoy that. But during the summer, I worked in some of the mills, also.

D: You did? Where?

P: As a young kid, fifteen years old, sixteen probably. I worked in the mills during the summer time.

D: What mills?

P: One in particular, I think its on Hamlet Avenue, ACS Industries, I worked there.

D: What did you do?|

P: I have no idea. They make plastic for lawn chairs, or something like that. And I knew, doing that, I knew, this is not the life for me.

D: You just handled small parts, so you didn't know what they went to.

P: No, right. Just long threads of plastic, that you had to keep, moving. So working there, during that summer, I knew then, that that was not a life for me. So, I did that that one summer, and never went back.

D: Did you work in any other mills?

P: No, no, that one was enough.

D: That's really interesting. Now, you've seen a lot of changes in your work over the years, here at city hall haven't you? For example, your using computer now.

P: Um, yeah, for the past year.

D: What's the difference between using computer and using the old IBM selectric?

P: OK, you can work, you cut your work practically, in to half. It's a lot more accurate also.

D: Do you cut your work or do you cut your work time?

P: Oh, I see what you mean, well, I guess you do cut your work time in to half. But, you know, that's more accurate. You cut your work time in to half.

D: What about more letters? I mean, if you can write twice as many letters, now, do they expect twice as many letters, now do they expect twice as many letters with the computer?

P: Not really, no. They are no more demanding now, that I have a computer than when I had the old typewriter.

D: How did you feel when you saw the computer coming through the door?

P: Terrified. As I think most people are, it's difficult, you know, you have to adjust, to change. And anything you don't know, I think your a little afraid of, and think maybe I won't be able to cope, I won't be able to do it. But, then, when you get started, and you think, God, this is a piece of cake, I love it, why was I so afraid of it? It's just like with you coming, I thought of it last

night, I thought, "he's coming, maybe he won't come today, maybe he'll change his mind." Because, that's the way I'm basically, still very insecure, and I'm afraid of change, I'm afraid of anything I don't know.

D: Well you seem to be empowered by your computer.

P: I do, I love it. I love it, it's like a toy.

D: What makes it so appealing, though?

P: Because, you can just type away, and if you don't like it, you can erase it. If you, you can type a fifty page document, you can do a spell check, you can hit this key and do a spell check. And it will go through your whole document and anything that is misspelled, it will correct it for you. Like if I spell accommodate wrong, and the first time it goes by, it will pick it up, and if it is spelled wrong, I have to correct it. The next say, fifty times, it comes to it, it will change it itself. Now, that's fascinating.

D: It is, it really is. Let's talk about skill now. How does that compare with using the IBM selectric, where if you had to center something for example, a heading.

P: It's just as easy. Well, on the machine, we have very modern typewriters, also. And it will do all of that also. It will center anything like that, it's pretty easy. You don't really have to have any skills to be a secretary today, you need a lot of common sense.

D: Now that's an interesting comment. What about when you started doing secretarial work?

P: All you really needed to know how to do was type and spell.

D: And you don't need those anymore.

P: Well in a sense, you do. You still need, today, you don't need as many skills., I would say, years ago. Because, years ago, you had to rely on your knowledge. Today, you can rely on the computer to a large degree.

D: That's interesting.

P: It's true.

D: So the skill has been transferred, hasn't it?

P: Well, I don't know if that's good or bad, but, to a large degree, it has. You don't have to be as sharp, as you had to years ago.

D: Does this make you more replaceable?

P: No.

D: Why is that?

P: Because, the computers will do a lot, but the computers will also create work, too.

D: Explain that.

P: Uh, you might have a computer that will cut your time load in half, but it also, creates more work. They expect, the computer will create this document, then they continually think of new documents for you to create.

D: Well, that's what I asked you about. I said, now do they want twice as many letters from you?

P: No, but its not necessarily they need it, but they'll think of it anyway.

D: I see.

P: So, you probably have a lot of work that's not necessary. I see a lot of work that we do that's really not necessary.

D: That's interesting. What about aspects of your job, away from the computer, what else do you do?

P: There's a lot of receptionist work, that goes into any job.

D: What does that consist of?

P: Just screening the different people that come in the office, for one thing or another, directing them, to where they want to go, that type of thing

D: Feel like you have to have certain skills for that?

P: No, but you definitely need a lot of patience. You need a pretty decent personality, too, Because, you would be surprised by the number of people who judge the whole department, or the whole town hall, by just one person they speak to. So you really have to, have a decent personality, or this person will go away saying, "That place stinks", and they have only talked to maybe one person who wasn't feeling that well that particular day. So, you have to keep that in the back of your mind. You really like a spokesperson for the office, more or less.

D: That's really interesting.

P: It's true, and it works that way at the hospital, too.

D: So there are skills here.

P: I really wouldn't want to call it a skill.

D: OK, why do you say hospital?

P: I work at a hospital, Woonsocket hospital.

D: Let's talk about that. Why do you work there?

P: Well, I was divorced recently, and I just needed extra money, this is personal, though.

D: Hey, you don't have to share it with me.

P: Yeah, all right, I won't.

D: OK

P: I just work at the hospital for extra money. I'll say that. [laughs]

D: OK, you have to do that. Do you think that's true for a lot of working women?

P: Well, A lot of working women should, maybe they don't, they should, they need to. I'm sure. Maybe, I don't have to, I think I have to. In todays economy, I would think a lot of people would have to supplement their income, especially, you know, single parent households. I would think so.

D: Yeah, do you see a lot of those in Rhode Island?

P: Oh, definitely. Woonsocket, there are a lot of women who are ahead of their households because of divorce, or they were just never married. There are so many unwed mothers, it's shocking.

D: What about at the hospital, how long ago did you start working there?

P: I've been there a year. A year.

D: What's your work there?

P: I work in the emergency room, whoever comes in the emergency room that needs treatment, we have to write them up, and that's what I do.

D: Do you like that job?

P: I like it, because Again, I'm dealing with people. ANd I like people. I like that part of it, but it's also depressing, because, you see a lot of alcoholics, you see a lot of drug abuse, child abuse.

D: What do mean when you say you have to write them up?

P: Well, when you come in for service, in order to bill you, we have to have all the information, we have to know who you are, where you work, your social security number, phone number and all that stuff. And I have to write what your problem is and we pass that along to the emergency room, to the doctor and nurse who are going to treat you.

D: I see. Do you like that job, the people you work with and stuff?

P: Where, here?

D: Either place.

P: I like, I don't particularly like personnel at the hospital, maybe they are under pressure, I find that they, this is probably not fair, I don't know, I just don't think they as caring as doctors and nurses should be.

D: Really?

P: Yeah.

D: Any reason for that? Just pressure?

P: I'm just assuming that. I don't know why, lots of the nurses work part time, and I imagine it is because, they can't handle it, working full time. That's why there is a shortage right now, I can see why they would only do it part time.

D: How are hospital wages?

P: They are really not that great. Not that great. I think nurses, probably only get something like \$14.00 an hour, which I think is really underpaid. When you have, you consider, secretaries here [city hall] who make that. I'm not one of them. [laughs]

D: You been with the planning department now, for what did you say, fifteen years? What advancement have you made, have you gone through different grade levels or anything?

P: Only one, only one. But, that's because, I'm basically, with no education, there's really no where for me to go. My job description was changed once, about five years ago, which gave me a boost in salary. But unless, I would go to school and get some sort of degree, there's only one step for me. I'm not really a secretary right now, that's the only next step for me, and there are no openings.

D: Are you unionized?

P: Yeah.

D: What union?

P: I don't even know. 'Cause I don't particularly believe in unions.

D: Why not?

P: I don't see really any good that they do, or what service they provide. I feel as if I do my job, and I'll get a raise, you know, and it's up to me to get the raise for myself.

D: That's interesting. Do you think other city hall employees, clerical workers feel that way?

P: Definitely not.

D" They believe in their unions a lot more. Why is that?

P: Lots of them see, I guess, what they feel a different type, which I'm sure they do exist, discriminations that exist, if not for the unions, they feel that they would all probably get the shaft, in some way or another, which they probably would., including myself.

D: What's the difference? Is your department easier to work for?

P: I think my department is very easy. Yeah, we have a good staff.

D: When you say a good staff, what does that mean?

P: Ah, well we have in my department, we have more college people than any of the other departments. And we all work, I think it's about half and half, and we all work very well together, there's no one saying, "well, I'm the boss, and your going to do this, this, and this." Everyone knows what their job is, no one looks over your shoulder, to make sure you do it. I know what my job is, I might take a fifteen minute coffee break, or I might not take a coffee break at all. But, they know regardless, that, I will do what I have to do. And that no one is going to have to say, Pauline, didn't get this done on time, or that I was doing something I shouldn't have. We have an understanding, and that is unusual, 'cause we have a staff of about sixteen people, and we all get along very well. Yeah.

D: What do you think the future is for you, are you going to spend the rest of your life in Woonsocket?

P: In Woonsocket, planning department?

D: Yeah.

P: I don't know, I often think about it. I never really thought about leaving Woonsocket, because I was just so attached to my family. You have a large family, and , being a large family, most large families are very close, close knit. And I never, although we are scattered, throughout the country at this point. Most of us are still here. I never thought I could leave my mother, so

to speak. But, I can actually see myself leaving WOonsocket, I don't want my children to live here. Because, it really has nothing to offer and I think it's really a hindrance and a lot, and they see so many of their friends and relatives, doing the same thing year after year. And they are not motivating at all. So, I would really like for all of my children to move away from Woonsocket.

D: How many children do you have?

P: I have three. My eighteen year old, the one who dropped out of college, he joined the navy, my daughter, she's fifteen, she's at home, but I have a nineteen year old son, he's out of school, he's trying to get into the air traffic controllers school, at this point. My daughter will be my scholar. I want a scholar in my family. And she wants to go to an all black college somewhere, who knows where, so I would make sure she does that. That's what she really wants to do.

D: Has she got any interest? What do you think she'll major in?

P: She loves math, so she's leaning toward accounting.

D: If you compare where your parents were, when your parents where in Woonsocket, and your children where they are starting or going to, what would you have to say about that?

P: They have definitely come along way. The kids today, very highly motivated, I'm talking about the teenagers today, they have very highly motivated, they have a lot of self esteem. They don't let anyone make them feel like they are nothing. They are proud of who they are.

D: That's interesting.

P: They are.

D: It's a contradiction, let me throw this at you, from what you were saying earlier, cause you said you were looking around at other kids, in Woonsocket, white and black who weren't motivated, and didn't

P: See this is a different level, when I say that, I'm talking about, the eighteen year old's and up, OK, and I'm talking about the fifteen year old's and down. Your going to see a change, I think, in those two groups of kids.

D: Well, that's optimistic. I'm glad to hear it.

P: Well, I can see it. I an feel it happening. My eighteen year old son, is getting there, but, I think he has maybe looked at his father, some of his uncles and they are doing anything, you know. ANd the younger kids, they're looking beyond that. That's why I think., for my son to leave, he would have to leave Woonsocket, in order to make it in life. Because we have a lot of unemployed men and women, young men and women. And the kids look at these people, and I wonder, what do they think?, what do they see?

D: Their relatives?

P: Yeah, exactly. That's why I was really glad when Gregory did join the navy. 'Cause I was afraid he might turn into one of those men, no matter how hard I tried, no matter how much I preached to him.

D: What about your future? You going to retire somewhere, some desert island and enjoy things?

P: I would live to retire from here. But, I think, you know, young woman, I could very easily meet some tall, dark, handsome guy, and move away from it all. This, for me, there's nothing happening in Woonsocket. I mean, what is there? There's nothing cultural for people to do, for anyone to do.

D: Your single again, aren't you?

P: Yes, and I'm beginning to look forward to it, really. But, then there are no eligible, not that I have anything against, you know, someone other than of color, but there's actually, no one here!

D: Let's talk about the meaning of your work. What have you gotten out of your life's work so far? What has it meant to you?

P: My work? God, that's ridiculous, this isn't meaningful work, I just enjoy doing it.

D: Well, that's meaning, you enjoy doing it.

P: Yeah? really, you think so? Well, I'll tell you, I suppose, it has helped the community somewhat. The community, the minority community, they do ask me often, about things that are going on in the building, in city hall. Sometimes, they're a little intimidated themselves, to find out what kind of program the city has to offer, so they'll call me sometimes.

D: They see you as an insider.

P: Exactly, exactly.

D: Do you feel like your protecting minority interest somehow by giving them information?

P: No, no I don't feel like I'm protecting them, because they don't need protecting, what they need to do, is get involved and find out themselves, what's going on. SO, sometimes, I will pass information along to them, But, I encourage them to come down and find out for themselves, but there'll always be a certain group, who will always call you, that won't do it themselves. So, it has helped my community a little bit, having me here, to make them feel a little more accessible to city hall.

D: Do you think sometimes, your put up as a role model?

P: Oh, definitely, definitely.

D: Why do you think that?

P: Well, lots of people see this as a really , "plum position", so to speak, working at city hall. I was probably the first, well there are only two actually, my sister she works in the treasury department downstairs. I was probably the first black female that they hired, here, at city hall. And they see it as a luxury position, for some reason, I don't know why, maybe because I've been here for so long.

D: OK, do you think the meaning, if we were to talk about more the meaning of work, what else would you include, you said you enjoyed the people you worked with, you enjoy having that role in the minority community in terms of your work, what else is there?

Do you have a sense of power at all in your work in being able to understand information?

P: Power?

D: I don't know if that's a good term, lets say control over events. Got any sense of control over events.

P: No, why should I? I've just, another pea in the pod, so to speak. I have, I suppose, I might know more about what's happening in city government than, say, my neighbor. and that gives me a certain, well maybe power, isn't the right word, but, I suppose I feel good that I'm "in the know", I know a little more of what's going on. We attend city events, I know a lot of politicians, they know me.

D: What do you think of the future of race and work in America is?

P: I think, um, at this point, there are a lot of problems that are going to erupt for all minorities, because I think, the white population is feeling the crunch. And they will blame minorities.

D: What kind of crunch?

P: Um, the housing situation, jobs, we are losing a lot of jobs to the Chinese. A lot of jobs are being lost through the Chinese. A lot of factories are being closed, and they blame, the Chinese or whomever, are taking these jobs away, not the government, I mean, its not because the Chinese are making products cheaper, its because we are buying them. And they are going to blame , instead of our government, I think they are going to blame the Chinese.

D: Do you think the government is to blame?

P: Well, I guess it's a two fold situation. I can understand why they want to import material that are a lot cheaper, but you should also try to take care of your country first. I don't know how your going to do that. But, I think that's part of the problem, I think a lot of factories are closing down and they're going to be hiring a lot of the Laotians who from what I understand, will work harder and cheaper. Though, I think your going to find

D: Your parents were accused of doing that weren't they?

P: Were they? Working harder and cheaper? Were they really? I wasn't aware of that.

D: Blacks sometimes were.

P: Were accused of, was this in the twenties? 1920's?

D: Thirties, even the forties.

P: Yeah, so really, they were, can you blame them now, if it was a better situation than what they were used to? Can you blame them for doing that?

D: Do you see a parallel with the Laotian situation?

P: Of course, they're the new scapegoats. It's terrible.

D: What about the future of work in America for your children? Do you think they are going to make it?

P: I think so, I think really, anyone, can make it if they really want to. If you really want to succeed, I don't see any stumbling block other than yourself, I really believe that. Regardless of who you are. I think if you want to succeed in something you will. Regardless of how many stumbling blocks are put in front of you, if you have that goal, then you just have to keep trying. And I think the younger kids, you know, the young kids, the fifteen year old, the sixteen year olds today, have a different attitude, and I think they will make us very proud of them. But I think Woonsocket has to do something to motivate all of the kids to get an education because, it's not there. The school system is not doing it.

D: Do you think they are trying?

P: I don't really think they are. The teachers, not that I'm downing the teachers, but teachers don't really know how to relate to minority students, you know. My daughter and her friends are constantly complaining about the dumb jokes the teachers make to them. And it's all because they don't realize that it's an insult. They don't realize. They think they are being friendly. When they are insulting the kids without really knowing it.

D: These are white teachers. Interesting.

P: Yeah, yeah, because we don't have any black teachers.

D: There are no black teachers, none?

P: None.

END OF TAPE